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The Last Day at Center Ridge School

By
Annette L. Smith

Price 35 Cents



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THE WILLIS N. BUGBEE CO., SYRACUSE, N. Y.

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The Last Day at Center Ridge School

CHARACTERS

Miss Lobelia Plant, *A stern teacher but very nice to the masculine sex.*

SCHOLARS

Dottie Lee	Ivory Black
Polly Anna	Perley White (<i>colored</i>)
Portia Shakespeare	Izzy Wright
Juliet Shakespeare	Bushby Bean
Ophelia Shakespeare	

SCHOOL BOARD

Ezra Bigfeel	<i>The pompous Chairman</i>
Johnathan Wiggs	<i>An old farmer, always chewing</i>
Ichabod Sleeper	<i>Who "has nothing to say."</i>

VISITORS

Mr. Longly Words	<i>Professor of English and lover of the classics</i>
Miss Cleopatra Ca-say	<i>A temperamental prima donna</i>
Miss Hardy-Knox	<i>A disappointed old maid</i>
Mrs. Lima Bean	<i>Aunt of Bush Bean</i>

TIME—*Present.*

PLACE—*A country village.*

TIME OF PLAYING—*About one and one-half hours.*

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COSTUMES AND CHARACTERISTICS

MR. BIGFEEL, age about 35, well dressed but not too modern. Black mustache. Very pompous and big feeling.

MR. SLEEPER, quite old—white wig and whiskers. Old frock coat, overalls and rubber boots. Speech very slow and hesitating.

MR. WIGGS, age about 45. Rather long hair, black beard, derby hat, cut-away coat and light pants. Jolly and loud in manner.

MR. WORDS, age about 40. Claw hammer coat, striped pants, high stiff collar, white spats and tall silk hat. Carries big book which he refers to frequently. Exceedingly precise and dignified.

MISS CA-SAY, elaborate dress and hat, opera cloak, affected in manner. Young.

MRS. LIMA BEAN, about 60. Old fashioned coat and hat, wears shawl. Indignant.

MISS KNOX, about 45. Hair frizzled, outlandish dress and hat, carries fan. Caustic.

TEACHER, about 40. Full flounced skirt, tight waist, hair in tight pug at top of head and side curls over ears. Simpers at all the men.

DOTTIE and POLLY, about 8. Middy blouses and dark skirts.

IVORY BLACK and IZZY WRIGHT, about 10 and 14. Knee pants and full blouses.

PERLEY WHITE (colored), about 12. Old white shirt, long overalls, rolled up, dirty white sneakers. Much in fear of teacher.

BUSHBY BEAN, to be taken by tall lanky adult. Tight knee pants, blue waist, roll sailor collar, white windsor tie, brown stockings, black shoes, bright red wig, face rouged on cheeks, left eye blackened. Dull and stupid.

PORTIA, white waist, dark skirt, hair done in knot at neck, dignified character.

JULIET, silly and gushing, white loose dress and blue sash, hair flowing.

OPHELIA, foolish, very short and fat, white waist, dress full, gathered in at neck, with sash tied higher than waist line. Dress held up by shoulder straps. Make very full and wear wide underskirts to puff it out at bottom. Hair curled and flying loose. Chews gum all the time.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

(As seen from audience)

Teacher's desk at center. Miss Knox sits at left behind desk. Teacher stands or sits next to her except when meeting visitors, etc. Miss CA-SAY has chair at right side of desk. MR. WORDS, at left side. School Board are seated at right of Miss C. MRS. BEAN has seat beyond the Board. SCHOLARS are seated on left and stand in front of seats to recite. BUSH BEAN occupies front seat.

If arranged in a half circle, all will face both school and audience.

The Last Day at Center Ridge School

ACT I

SCENE: *A town or village hall. TEACHER is discovered at desk straightening up books, etc.*

(*Enter MISS HARDY-KNOX.*)

MISS HARDY KNOX. Well, I suppose you'll think that I came awfully early but I had a chance to ride over from Pig Lane, so I came right along. Why, Lobelia Plant, you look clean tuckered out!

TEACHER. I am terribly tired but this is the last day of school and I can rest up a bit now I hope. I always hate the closing day. All the parents come snooping around to try to pick flaws and the School Board sit around and look wise.

MISS KNOX. Yes, old Mr. Wiggs will be chewing that endless cud of his and Mr. Sleeper will be taking a nap every five minutes. What they ever put those two old dummies on the Board for was more than I know.

TEACHER. Mr. Bigfeel is the only one that has an ounce of brains. I hope he don't trip my scholars up with any of his questions. Some folks say he's a walking interrogation point. Well, it's one o'clock. I'll ring the bell. (*Rings bell loudly.*)

(*Scholars straggle in noisily and out of order, smallest first, BUSH BEAN bringing up at the rear with a bouquet and apple for teacher. He rubs this to polish it. All sit. Teacher calls roll, each stands and says "Present." Teacher walks over to BUSH, takes side comb from own hair and fixes his. Also wipes his nose and cleans out one ear. Does not notice black eye.*)

TEACHER (*going back to desk*). Now scholars, we will sing one verse of the Star Spangled Banner—All rise, please. (*Begins*) "Oh, say—"

(*Enter OPHELIA out of breath.*)

TEACHER. Ophelia Shakespeare, couldn't you get here on time even the last day? And where is your little brother?

OPHELIA. Oh, teecher, he's awfully sick.

TEACHER. Sick? He was all right this morning. What is the matter?

OPHELIA. Hamlet wanted an omlet for his dinner. And he went out and got some eggs that an old hen had been sitting on for more'n a week. My mother didn't know it an she cooked them. Now he's flapping his hands around just as if he was trying to fly and making a noise just like a chicken. And he can't stop neither.

TEACHER. Ophelia! The idea of such a thing.

OPHELIA. Honest, teecher, I ain't romancing.

TEACHER. I guess he'll be all right pretty soon. Now, scholars we will start again. Izzy, straighten up, you're humped over like an old man. Now—all together—keep in time—(*beats time with ruler*). Sing—

ALL. "Oh, say, can you see—"

(Enter PERLEY WHITE.)

TEACHER. Perley White, what do you mean by coming in as late as this?

PERLEY (*scared*). Mah mammy done made me late.

TEACHER (*sternly*). How was that?

PERLEY. She done said mah neck and years wuz dirty. And she pooty near scrubbed the skin offen me.

TEACHER. Well, take your place. Now, I guess everyone is here at last. Once more. 1-2-3- (*beating time*). Sing. (*False start, repeat, all out of tune—BUSH is half a line behind the rest. Izzy roars out a note here and there. Teacher ends line on wrong note. Gives it up at last in middle of verse.*) Well, if we can't do any better than that I guess we'd better stop right here. (*All sit.*)

(Enter MR. SLEEPER and MR. WIGGS. TEACHER greets them.)

TEACHER. How do you do Mr. Johnathan Wiggs. Glad to see you, Mr. Sleeper. Sit down. Where is Mr. Bigfeel? Surely he's coming?

MR. WIGGS. Oh, yes marm, he's comin'. At least he's on his way. That tin contrapshun that he calls his Lizzie has just coughed herself to death on Meeting House Hill. Hosses is good enuf fer us, hain't they, Ichabod?

MISS KNOX (*aside to teacher*). Ichabod—that means "the glory is departed." He looks it, don't he?

TEACHER (*discovers Izzy eating cake*). Izzy, what are you doing? Didn't you have your dinner? Put that down.

IZZY (*with mouth full and chewing fast*). Am puttin' it down, fast as I can.

(Enter MR. BIGFEEL.)

MR. BIGFEEL. Ah, I see I am late, am I not? Good afternoon, Lobelia. (*Shakes hands with teacher who goes forward to meet him.*) I suppose I should, to be correct, address you as Miss Lobelia—yes? Or Miss Plant perhaps? Miss Lobelia Plant, fine sensible name that, is it not? I was sorry to hear of the loss of our Center Ridge School house. Struck by lightning, did I hear? Ah, yes, I did. But the building was old and sadly in need of repairs. So you decided to use the Town Hall for the exercises. (*Teacher offers him chair.*) Many thanks, Miss Plant.

MISS KNOX (*talking to teacher*). His first name's "Ezra" and that means help. Exactly what I feel like yelling every time I see him.

PORTIA (*talking to JULIET*). Mamma says the reason Miss Knox is so down on Mr. Bigfeel is cause she tried to set her cap for him years ago and he wouldn't even look at her.

OPHELIA (*butting in*). I bet you Mr. Bigfeel is trying to get a crush on teacher. Did you see how long he held her hand?

JULIET (*gushingly*). Oh, how rheumantic. Poor Miss Knox. Isn't it sad to have your life busted all up like that? I hope nothing of the kind ever happens to me. When I get old enough to have a Romeo I'm going to spoon with him out of the winder just like they did in the play. I ain't got no balcony but I can nail a soap-box on just outside, and he can climb up the grape vine and I'll lean way out and talk to him.

OPHELIA. You're clean daffy about fellers, Juliet. You can have Bush Bean for your Romeo.

JULIET (*pulling OPHELIA's hair*). I should think you wanted him by the way you ran after him the other day.

OPHELIA. Oh, shut up. You wait till after school.

TEACHER (*stops talking to MISS KNOX about some papers she shows her*). Girls, stop that whispering at once.

(*Enter MR. LONGLY WORDS with big book under arm and large umbrella rolled loosely.*)

MR. WORDS. The approximation of my corporosity on this auspicious and ceremonious occasion and the salubrious ephemeral meteorological phenomena induce within my cardiac region sentiments of the most stupendous gratification.

(*TEACHER looks puzzled at speech. Scholars with mouths wide open, staring. MR. WIGGS leans over to look at him. Others bewildered.*)

(*MR. SLEEPER begins to yawn. Some of the scholars catch it. TEACHER places seat for MR. WORDS at close of speech.*)

MR. WIGGS (*thunderstruck*). Wal—say, them wuz some right sizable words you slung round here. I've had a tolerable mount of edecashun but I'm hern-swoggled if I know what you wuz talking about. And I'm a member of this skool bord and a selictman too, by gum.

MR. WORDS. Excuse me, Mr. Wiggs. Excuse me. (*Bowing very low with hand on heart.*) As a Professor of English and a great lover of the classical literature, I fear I have used the speech of an academician. Do excuse me. I was merely saying that it gave me great pleasure to be with you this afternoon. That was all.

MR. WIGGS (*astonished*). Wuz that all? Wal, I'll be dog-gorned. Would yer ever have thot it, Ichabod?

MR. SLEEPER (*rousing up and drawling out*). I—I ain't got nothin' ter say.

(*Enter MRS. LIMA BEAN, umbrella in hand, ruffled up and indignant.*)

MRS. BEAN. Well, I did intend to get here earlier but I was waiting for my hens to lay me just one more egg cause I only needed that one to make a dozen. I thought being as how I was coming right down by Grey's store I could bring them along and get me a bottle of vanniller extract and some frosting sugar for a cake I had promised to bake for the Ladies' Circle. Then after waiting and making myself late and losing a ride inter the bargain, all I got was a soft shelled one. And I couldn't bring that seeing as how he won't take that kind. I don't know why he won't. I just as soon have a soft shelled egg as a hard one any day. They're just as good.

TEACHER. The exercises have not started yet, Mrs. Bean. Sit over here. (*Seats her beside MR. SLEEPER.*)

MRS. BEAN (*going toward seat but not sitting down*). Thank you, but first I've got something on my mind that I've wanted to say to you for a long time. And I guess this is as good a chance as any. I never was one to beat about the bush.

IVORY BLACK (*leaning over desk*). Hey, Bush, is that right?

TEACHER. Ivory Black—be silent.

MRS. BEAN. As I was saying, as the natural protector of my

husband's brother's *dead boy*, I aim to see he's treated fair. He hain't been in this school, for you've kept him in that second reader for almost two years. Do you aim to keep him there the rest of his natural life, Lobelia Plant?

TEACHER. I can't promote him if he don't learn, Mrs. Bean. Won't you sit down?

MRS. BEAN. And another thing that riles me up is the way those big boys abuse the poor little chap. It's a shame. He comes home with his clothes all torn off his back, to say nothing of the bumps and bruises he gets. Yesterday he came home with that black eye. Just look at it. It's a sight. And when I asked him how he got it, he said that that big lummo of an Ophelia Shakespeare was trying to kiss him and he fell over a rock trying to get away from her. If the over-grown huzzy belonged to me I'd fix her.

OPHELIA (*jumping up and pointing finger at MRS. BEAN*). You just try it. I dare you to touch me. My father would settle you pretty quick.

TEACHER. Ophelia, sit down and be quiet. No one is going to touch you while under my charge. (*Black looks from MRS. BEAN to both.*)

MRS. BEAN. Pretty actions. I must say. But then you can't expect much of a child whose mother is always reading Shakespeare and claiming how they're descendants of his, while the sink is piled with dirty dishes. (*Sits down.*)

MISS KNOX (*to teacher who has gone back to desk*). Ha! ha! ha!—did you hear what she said—her husband's brother's *dead boy*? That explains a number of things to me. I've often wondered what made him act so queer. And here he's been dead ever so long and never knew it. Ha! ha! ha!

(*Enter CLEOPATRA CA-SAY—gushingly.*)

MISS C. Oh! I was so afraid I couldn't get here. Such roads! Nothing but dirt and gravel ones. Not a mecadam road for miles. My chauffeur nearly ditched the car coming across from Bow Lake Village. It was frightful! Stones the size of watermelons scattered all along. I feel all un-nerved from it. Really I do. I am afraid my voice is just ruined. I have to be so very careful, you know. But I am here. Just to think that I, Cleopatra Ca-say, used to attend Center Ridge School.

TEACHER (*shaking hands and showing great pride in having her there*). Yes, indeed, and now you are the Prima Donna of the Metropolitan Opera Company. It was so good of you to come, Miss Ca-say. Here's a comfortable seat.

MISS KNOX (*in high mimicing voice*). Cleopatra Ca-say. Oh piffle—I might swallow that if I hadn't set right behind her in school. Cleopatra Ca-say—in those days her name was Clara Casey. (*Wise looks all around.*)

OPHELIA (*to scholars*). She's jealous. Isn't Miss Ca-say a peach?

TEACHER. Mr. Bigfeel, will you examine the class in arithmetic?

MR. BIGFEEL (*rising*). Indeed I will, Miss Lobelia. Young man, (*pointing to IZZY who stands up*) if I had fifty bushels of apples which I shipped to Boston at \$2.00 per bushel how much money would I receive?

IZZY (*scratching his head and reckoning on fingers*). \$98.00.

MR. BIGFEEL. You had better figure that out again.

IZZY. I don't have to. That's correct.

MR. BIGFEEL. How can you be correct, young man? Fifty bushels at \$2.00 per bushel?

IZZY. Yes, but they wouldn't pay you for the bushel of rotten ones you'd stick in.

TEACHER (*shocked*). Izzy Wright!

MR. WIGGS (*quickly*). Coss he's right. I've bought taters of him. I ought ter know. Haint I Ichabod?

(MR. BIGFEEL *sits down hastily*.)

MR. SLEEPER. I—ain't—got—nothin'—ter say.

TEACHER. Class in spelling next. Dottie, Polly Anna, Ivory Black, Perley White, Bushby Bean. (*All come forward and line up in front of desks*.) Polly Anna, spell principal and give us an illustration of what it means.

POLLY ANNA. P-r-i-n- prin, c-i- ci, p-a-l- pal, principal (*looks about and discovers the principal of the local school, gives his name*.)

TEACHER. Now, Dottie Lee—comfortable.

DOTTIE. C-o-m- com, f-o-r-t- fort, g-a-b-l-e, comfortable.

TEACHER. Why, Dottie, there isn't any sound of g in comfortable.

DOTTIE. No marm, it's silent, same as in cow.

TEACHER. Perley—purity.

PERLEY (*shuffling his feet*). P-u-r-i-t-e-y purity. I don't know what that is.

TEACHER. Why, of course you do. What is the snow?

PERLEY (*brightening up*). White—same as me.

MR. WIGGS. Huh! You're black.

IVORY (*stepping toward him*). No. I'm black. He's white.

MR. WIGGS. Wal, perhaps he is but he looks mighty black to me from over here. Don't you think so, Ichabod?

MR. SLEEPER. Maybe, maybe, I ain't got nothin to say.

MISS KNOX. The poor old man. I guess he's right. Ever since he signed all his property over to that young wife of his I expect he hasn't had a chance to say nothing.

TEACHER. Bush! (*BUSH is gawping around*.) Bushby Bean. Spell catastrophe and give the meaning.

BUSH (*slowly—twisting about and shuffling his feet*). Catastrophe—c-a-t- cat, c-a-t- cat, c—

OPHELIA. If he don't hurry up that cat will die of old age.

TEACHER. Ophelia, be still. Now Bush, try once more. Catastrophe.

BUSH. C-a-t- cat, r-a-s- ras, t-t-t- teecheer, I can't spell it but I know what it means.

TEACHER. Well, tell us that then.

BUSH (*with a grin at MR. BIGFEEL and a glance at his aunt who sits up and begins to act nervous*). When they put Mr. Bigfeel in chairman of the School Board my aunt (*MRS. BEAN half rises and shakes her head at him but he goes on*) said it was nothing short of a catastrophe. (*MRS. BEAN sits back and drops her head*.)

MR. WIGGS. Haw! haw! haw! Ain't such a fool as he looks, hey Ichabod?

MR. SLEEPER. I ain't got nothin ter say.

TEACHER. The class may return to their seats. We will now have recess.

(The scholars may file out and return at ringing of bell or if played where there is no stage may remain in seats and the orchestra or some instrumental music may be used to fill in between acts. Where curtain is used, have scholars and visitors in same positions at beginning of second act.)

ACT II

SCENE: Same as in ACT I.

TEACHER. Now, scholars, we are to have an unexpected treat. Miss Ca-say will sing for us. Miss Ca-say, if you will be so kind.

(MISS CA-SAY rises and goes to piano which may be placed in corner back of scholars facing toward audience. She sings a selection from some opera in either French or Italian.)

MISS CA-SAY *(at close)*. How did you like that? That was one of my greatest successes of the season.

MR. WIGGS. Wal, marm, it seemed like it was a powerful lot of work but speaking for myself I'd ruther know what a person was singin' bout stead of that furrin sort of screechin'. Can't you sing "Be it ever so homely?"

MISS CA-SAY. Why, most assuredly, Mr. Wiggs. I should have known something *simple* would have suited you much better.

(She sings "Home, Sweet Home." MR. WORDS wipes his eyes, then draws out his handkerchief. MISS KNOX begins to sniffle, then teacher, and finally all three are weeping. At close MISS CA-SAY returns to seat. MR. LONGLY WORDS rises and compliments her.)

MR. WORDS. Your meliflous and euphonious vocalization, Miss Ca-say, impinge upon my olfactory ganglia with the most exquisite sensations.

MISS CA-SAY. Thank you, Mr. Words.

MRS. BEAN *(to teacher)*. There, Lobelia Plant, that's what I call edecation. Here's you, a school teacher, going on twenty years and you can't get past words of more'n one syllable yet. No wonder Bush Bean don't larn nothin'.

TEACHER *(angrily)*. If you'd furnish your Beans with brains I'd have a better show at it. I'll leave it to the School Board. Bush Bean, get your book and read the lesson on Page 17. Now do your very best, Bushby.

BUSH *(rising, comes forward, twists and turns and wiggles as he reads)*. The—bottle—crawled—across—the road.

TEACHER. Bush, beetle—not bottle.

MR. WIGGS. Haw! haw! haw! That must have been before we had prohibition. Bottle crawled across the road. Haw! haw! haw!

TEACHER. Go on, Bushby—now be careful.

BUSH. A—mouse—grubbed—the b-b-b-bottle. *(Pronounces MOUSE very loudly.)*

MR. WORDS *(jumping up and swinging his umbrella)*. What?

TEACHER. What? *(Looks around to see what MR. WORDS is trying to find.)*

MISS KNOX. What—what is the matter, Mr. Words?

MR. WORDS. A mouse! (*With one foot on his chair and swinging umbrella.*)

(TEACHER gives a squeal and tries to climb up on the same chair that MISS KNOX has already mounted. MISS KNOX fears the chair will break under the extra weight and pushes LOBELIA down. She continues to put one foot on the seat and climb up.)

ALL. Mouse! mouse! where? (*Signs of uneasiness all over room.*)

BUSH (*grinning*). I read bout one. Te! he! he!

(TEACHER and MISS KNOX calm down. MR. WORDS still looks about him under the seats, finally sitting down also.)

TEACHER (*angrily taking her spite out on BUSH*). You stupid boy—how many times must I tell you that beetle is the right word. And it was a moose, not a mouse. Grabbed—not grubbed. That will do. I guess there's proof enough that he will have to stay in this reader a while longer. (*Throws triumphant look at MRS. BEAN, who sits with lowered head, quite squelched.*) Next, class in English. (*Class consisting of JULIET, PORTIA and OPHELIA, comes forward.*) Mr. Longly Words, will you please hear this class?

MR. WORDS. Thank you, I shall be most delighted to do so. Portia, can you recite for me any passage from the character whose name you bear? (*Consults book.*)

PORTIA. Yes, sir. "That light we see is burning in our hall—(*points to lamp*) How far that little kerosene lamp throws his beams. So shines a good deed in this naughty town. So doth the greater glory dim the less."

MR. WORDS. Well, that's pretty fair, Portia, a few mistakes but very good. What can you repeat, Juliet?

JULIET (*advancing towards MR. W. with arms outstretched—smiling tenderly*). "Oh, Romeo, my Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo? Goodnight—goodnight—parting be such sweet sorrow, that I could say goodnight, till it be morrow." (*MR. WORDS retreats and she follows him up till he bumps into MISS KNOX, who in turn hitches back and pushes the TEACHER. MR. WORDS grabs umbrella and holds book in front of him.*)

MR. WORDS. Very well done, Juliet, a little too much action perhaps but very good, very good. What was the fate of your namesake?

JULIET. She went and killed herself with some sort of bug-killer. She done it cause her folks was going to make her marry a Frenchman.

MR. WORDS (*opening book and seaching through it*). A Frenchman—ahem—a Frenchman?

JULIET. Well, anyhow his name was Paris.

MR. WORDS. You should read that beautiful classic again and become more familiar with it. Young ladies, the fascination of poetry lies not only in the ability to deliver a correct rendition of the verse. It is immeasurably more. You must also possess an erudition of its recondite meaning. Ophelia, what have you learned?

OPHELIA (*stepping forward and gazing at ceiling*).

"Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark?"

Then the Queen said (*speaking in a sing song*):

"He is dead and gone, lady, he is dead and gone,
At his head a grass green turf, at his heels a stone.
White is his shroud as the Green Mountain Snow,
Garnished all with flowers, which bewept
To his grave did go, with thunder-showers."

MR. WORDS (*excitedly*). No, no, my dear, (*tenderly*) "With true love showers."

OPHELIA (*chewing gum*). I don't know nothin' 'bout that kind.

MR. WORDS (*shaking head*). Dear me! Dear me! What happened to Ophelia after her father's death?

OPHELIA. She went batty—(*seeing him look puzzled and press his hand to forehead*)—bughouse—the squirrels chased her—she was a nut—ain't you wise?

MR. WORDS (*sinking into chair and fanning himself*). My word! What language is that—English—dear me! I never found it in my encyclopedia. (*Opens book and turns leaves rapidly*.)

TEACHER. Take your seats. Dottie, what is it?

DOTTY (*waving hand excitedly*). I can speak a piece in English.

MR. WORDS (*preparing for the worst*). I should like to hear it.

DOTTIE.

The helk and the helephant hentered the hark,

When the helements hopened the ball.

Said the helk to the helephant, "What's to heat?"

Said the helephant, "Ay, that's hall."

Now the helk and the helephant ates their ay.

Said the helk with a heloquent sigh,

"I opes as you're appy this orrible day,"

And the helephant answered "I."

MR. WORDS (*weakly, moping his brow*). Thank you. (*To himself*.) English—more English! My word! my word!

TEACHER. Ivory Black, show the visitors how well you can recite in Physiology. What is anatomy?

IVORY. Anotomy is the human body. It consists of three parts, the head, the chest and the stummick. The head contains the eyes and brains, if any; the chest contains the lungs and a piece of the liver. The stummick is devoted to the bowels of which there are five;—A, E, I, O, U, and somtimes w and y.

TEACHER. You may sit down. Perley White, what can you tell us about Plymouth Rock?

PERLEY. Dere's three kinds—red, white and barred. Mah mammy done says dey's de best hens she ebber saw if dey wouldn't sot so much.

TEACHER. I referred to quite another thing. That will do. Izzy Wright, recite the speech of John Adams.

IZZY (*very fast*). Live or die—survive or perish—

TEACHER. You have left something out.

IZZY. Did I forget to sink or swim?

TEACHER. Begin again.

IZZY. I know when I learned to swim I was always sinking, and 'fore I got so I could swim I thought sure I would perish.

TEACHER. Izzy Wright, we care nothing about your troubles in mastering the art of swimming. I said begin again.

IZZY (*slowly without any stop between sentences*). Sink or swim, live or die,—no, survive or perish I give my hands and my hearts to this vote. That was Woman's Suffrage, wasn't it teacher?

TEACHER. No, they had never heard of Woman Suffrage in those days.

MR. WIGGS. 'Twould be a mighty good thing, by gosh, if they hadn't now.

MISS KNOX. Woman is the equal and ten times out of nine the superior of any man. (*Throwing a hard look at WIGGS.*)

TEACHER. Izzy, go on.

IZZY. It is true in the beginning we aimed not at impudence—

TEACHER. Not impudence—independence. You had better sit down.

MR. WIGGS. He don't need to aim at impudence—he just naturally hits it without. Ain't that right, Ichabod?

MR. SLEEPER. Well-I-I-oh, I ain't got nothin' to say. (*Slumps down in seat.*)

TEACHER. Now that's about all so far as the regular studies are concerned. We've got some pieces and songs that we've learned specially for the occasion. Polly Anna, you may play your piano solo now.

(*POLLY goes to piano, begins, makes mistake and stops.*)

TEACHER. Polly Anna, wasn't that a discord?

POLLY. No marm, that was an accidental. My finger slipped. (*She plays it through and returns to seat.*)

TEACHER. Ivory Black, please recite your piece.

IVORY. I lost my piece, teacher, and I can't say it without the paper but I can tell a story.

TEACHER. Very well, let us hear it.

IVORY. Last spring Charlie Brown (*any local name*) had a man coming from Boston to see him about some lumber. The weather got awful bad and it rained and a big thaw came on. So much ice came down the river it carried a bridge away and the trains couldn't run. So the man telegraphed Charlie—"Washout on line—can't come." Charlie wanted to see him right away so he telegraphed back, "Buy another shirt and come on next train." Te! he! he!

MR. WIGGS. Haw! haw! haw! Can ye beat that now? Smart boy, hey Ichabod?

MR. SLEEPER (*waking up*). No, my love, I ain't got nothin' to say. (*Discovers he is not at home and acts embarrassed.*)

MISS KNOX (*indignantly*). I don't believe a word of it. Charlie Brown is just as generous as he can be and with all them shirts in his store he'd just sent him one parcel post instead of telling him to buy one. Don't believe a single word of it.

BUSH. Teacher, can I tell one, too.

TEACHER. No, you can't—you're going to help the others sing that song.

BUSH. Shucks! I never can do what I want to. I don't like to sing with that old Phelia Shakespeare.

TEACHER. You don't have to stand next to her—you stand beside of Perley. Come now—already!

(POLLY, OPHELIA, PERLEY and BUSHBY may sing "The Rheumatiz," using canes and acting out the song. Laughter and comments by visitors.)

TEACHER. Dottie Lee, you may recite your piece now. (She may recite "When the Teacher Gets Cross," or any other good recitation as desired.)

TEACHER. You may speak yours next, Juliet. ("Watching the sparking" is suggested as a good number.)

TEACHER. Next we will have a duet by Izzy Wright and Portia Shakespeare. Sing it up good and loud.

PORTIA and IZZY. Yes, marm. (They may sing "Sally and Si at the Circus.")

MR. WIGGS. Haw! haw! haw! They did "dew it" purty slick, didn't they? Haw! haw!

(Additional songs and recitations may be introduced to make the program longer if desired. See page 15.)

TEACHER. Now the children have all spoken their pieces and sung their songs except the closing song but before we do that we would like to hear a few words from the school board. Mr. Bigfeel, as chairman, I will call on you first.

MR. BIGFEEL. Well, Miss Lobelia, I really had no speech prepared worthy of the assemblage here. I have greatly enjoyed the exercises. Ah yes, I have, but I will not take any more of your valuable time. Let us hear from some of the rest, Miss Lobelia.

TEACHER. Mr. Sleeper, may we hear from you?

MR. SLEEPER (rubbing his eyes and blinking). Now, Miss Lobely, I feel—I feel—(yawns) I—I ain't got nothin' ter say. (sits down.)

TEACHER. Mr. Wiggs—we'd like to hear from you.

MR. WIGGS (getting up and removing his cud). Wal, it's just like this, Miss Lobely, I had an all-fired good speech all made up concerning our cistern of edecashun of the rising generashun but this here professor's knocked it plumb out'n my head, soon's he begun spouting off those big words of his'n. (MR. WORDS listens with a puzzled look—grabs book and turns rapidly through to a page where he stops and reads it with nose close to book.) But I du want ter tell yer that I think that you've made a mighty good showing with the material you've had ter work with. Coss the school bord has got ter take that inter considyrashun. Now there's Bush Bean, fer instance, there nary was a teacher what ever could larn none of them Beans anything. None of them ever knew nothin'. Cause they didn't have any brains.

MRS. LIMA BEAN (jumping up and glaring at Wiggs). See here, Johnathan Wiggs. I'll have you understand there ain't no bigger shortage in my family then there is in yours. Your grandthur was a plumb ijiot and your own mother died of softnin' of the brains.

MR. WIGGS. Wal, that showed she had some brains ter git soft, didn't it? Yer father was so blamed thick he died of hardnin' of the arteries.

TEACHER (stepping forward). Mrs. Bean—Mr. Wiggs—please

don't talk like that right before all these people. (*Both sit down, still glaring at each other.*)

MISS KNOX. Thank goodness you headed them off, Lobelia. I thought we was going to hear their family histories back for a hundred years.

TEACHER. Miss Knox, would you like to speak to the scholars?

MISS KNOX. Who? Me? My soul, no. I never speak to one of the sassy brats if I can help it. Besides I think there's been enough speaking done already.

TEACHER. Miss Ca-say? (MISS CA-SAY *shakes head and murmurs "No, thank you."*) Mr Words?

MR. WORDS (*bowing to MISS KNOX, who smirks back*). I quite agree with Miss Knox.

TEACHER. We will conclude our exercises by singing the school song.

OPHELIA (*to MR. WORDS*). It was rotten and decomposed by our teacher. (MR. WORDS *grabs book and opens it again, holding on to nose.*)

TEACHER. Be still, Ophelia. She means *written and composed*, Mr. Words.

(*She passes copies of song to visitors, All sing.*)

SCHOOL SONG

(*Tune, "Auld Lang Syne."*)

Oh teacher, scholars, now must we
 Bid each a fond farewell,
 Because we shall not meet again
 Before the opening bell—
 That brazen bell that calls us from
 Our frolic and our fun
 And keeps us working at our tasks
 Until school days are done.

Good-bye, dear teacher, much we hope
 You'll be with us once more
 Because you are not near so cross
 As the one we had before.
 We hope the School Board will excuse
 What errors they have seen
 For we are really quite smart folks,
 Except poor Bushby Bean.

Dear friends and neighbors, we must now
 Bid you a fond adieu;
 The parting gives us great regret
 Although our tears are few.
 So good-bye, Black and White and Wright,
 All scholars, big and small—
 A fond farewell to every one
 Assembled in this hall.

(*At close of song all sit down.*)

TEACHER. I hope we shall meet again this fall, children. Be very good boys and girls till then and don't forget your studies. Now pick up all your books and other articles and pass out quietly.

(All leave noisily. BUSH BEAN brings up at the rear and when passing desk he grabs bouquet and apple and refuses to say good-bye as the others have done. Visitors leave, Mr. BIGFEEL first, then MRS. BEAN sweeps out, head in air without speaking to LOBELIA. MISS KNOX goes next, then MISS CA-SAY and Mr. WORDS. Mr. SLEEPER is asleep in chair. TEACHER picks up some books, packs a bag and starts out. When almost out Mr. SLEEPER snores and LOBELIA turns back, sees him, goes and shakes him. Mr. S. wakes, looks about rather surprised and LOBELIA leads him out.)

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